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The acquisition of the Dutch quantitative pronoun ER: the role of background language(s)

Sanne Berends  Petra Sleeman  Aafke Hulk  Jeannette Schaeffer

Introduction

This study looks at transfer from L1 French and L1 English to the L2 Dutch. We specifically look at the ability to judge and imitate morphosyntactic and semantic structures with the quantitative pronoun ER.

Dutch
Syntax
- presence vs absence
- *Ik lees ER drie
  - J’EN la troisième
- *Ik lees drie
  - J’EN les trois
Semantics
- indefiniteness vs definiteness
- *Ik lees ER ene helboel
  - J’EN un grand nombre
- *Ik lees ER de helboel
  - J’EN la moitié
- *Ik lees ER sommige
  - J’EN les certains

Dutch and French have a quantitative pronoun that accompanies a complex NP modified by a cardinal numeral or weak quantifier. The licensing conditions of these pronouns (Dutch: ER, French: EN) differ partially (e.g. Benveniste, 1986; Sleeman, 1996). English does not have a quantitative pronoun.

Materials
- Grammaticality Judgement Task
  - 3 experimental conditions (N=30), 15 fillers
- Sentence Imitation Task
  - 3 experimental conditions (N=12), 8 fillers
- Dutch Vocabulary Task, Digit Span, Questionnaire

Participants
- L1 French (N=25), highly advanced, level > B2
- L1 English (N=25), highly advanced, level > B2
- L1 Dutch (N=25)

Average years of exposure: L1 French (22.1) L1 English (19.7)

Comparison results French-Dutch and English-Dutch

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SI</th>
<th>Dutch</th>
<th>L1 French</th>
<th>L1 English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GJT</td>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>presence</td>
<td>positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>absence</td>
<td>positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantics</td>
<td>indefiniteness</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>p = 2.18e-05 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>definiteness</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>p = 0.08448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantics</td>
<td>non-presuppositionality vs presuppositionality</td>
<td>positive</td>
<td>p = 7.25e-10 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(presuppositionality)</td>
<td>negative</td>
<td>p = 0.1722</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6/8 predictions confirmed 5/6 predictions confirmed

In the SI the L1 English speakers behaved as expected, however the L1 French speakers did not: apparently they behave just like the L1 English speakers.

GJT

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<td></td>
<td>presuppositionality</td>
<td>negative</td>
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</table>

5/6 predictions confirmed 2/6 predictions confirmed

In the GJT the L1 French seems to have an influence on L2 Dutch, like we expected, BUT a comparison between the L1 French and the L1 English speakers also shows that the L2 French speakers behave exactly the same as the L1 English speakers.

Discussion

Our predictions were based on Dutch being the L2 for both groups. However, all of the L1 French participants speak English too, and since all participants live in The Netherlands they come into contact with English on a regular basis. This leads to the idea that Dutch is in fact their L3.

By considering Dutch as an L3 for the L1 French group, we implemented the L2 Status Factor (Bardel and Falk, 2007) that claims that the L2 acts as a filter, thereby blocking transfer from the L1 at the syntactic level. Thus, the L2 might have a bigger impact on learning the L3 than the L1. In that case we do not expect to find significant differences between the L1 French and the L1 English groups.

No significant difference between the L1 French and L1 English groups have been found in the GJT, thereby confirming the L2 Status Factor.

Conclusion

Our goal was to look at the role of L1 French and L1 English on the L2 acquisition of the Dutch quantitative pronoun ER. However, we found that for the L1 English group Dutch is considered the ‘real L2’, and for the L1 French group English should be considered the L2 and Dutch the L3, thereby confirming the L2 Status Factor.

References and Acknowledgements


We would like to thank Tom Rooper and Jason Rothman for their useful comments and discussion on this research.